

“Who Am I”

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, November 2011

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting Self-Portrait (David Whyte)

It doesn't interest me if there is one God

Or many gods.

I want to know if you belong -- or feel abandoned;

If you know despair

Or can see it in others.

I want to know

If you are prepared to live in the world

With its harsh need to change you;

If you can look back with firm eyes

Saying "this is where I stand."

I want to know if you know how to melt

Into that fierce heat of living

Falling toward the center of your longing.

I want to know if you are willing

To live day by day

With the consequence of love

And the bitter unwanted passion

Of your sure defeat.

I have been told

In that fierce embrace

Even the gods

Speak of God.

Purpose of Sharing Circles

“We practice the art of speaking and listening from the heart as a path to personal growth”

The Small Group Ministry program seeks to achieve its mission by helping participants

- connect to a cadre of new friends and deepen those connections over time;
- build commitment to each other and to our faith community;
- practice the art of covenantal relationship;
- engage in the spiritual practice of attentive listening and deep sharing;
- create a “safe space” in which to explore difficult-to-share feelings, needs and stories;
- care for one another during times of trouble and celebration;
- develop and clarify personal values, beliefs and theology;
- teach, learn and model group facilitation skills;
- contribute to the fulfillment of the mission and vision goals of our congregation.

Our Covenants

Check-in

Quotes [Quotes are on a separate sheet below for use at your discretion.]

Introductory Exercise [The leader material for this exercise is on a separate sheet below for Facilitator eyes only.]

Questions for Discussion

1. What *feelings* came up for you as you went through the nine introductory exercise questions? Try to stick to feelings, describing them as fully as you can.
2. What was the image that came to you in answer to the question “Who am I?” Did the image surprise you? Did you reject an image and look for another?
3. Tell us something about your name.
4. Did you find any connections between your “I am” sentences and the times in your life when you have felt most alive, focused, connected, complete, and joyful?
5. Did the words on your gravestone reflect who you are right now or who you aspire to become before you die? Would you like to share those words?
6. Talk about your thought process and feelings as you tried to identify the “I am” sentence that most essentially described who you are? Did you add any sentences as you went along? Were any of the decisions more difficult than others? Would you like to share your list or some of the sentences on your list?

Closing Words /Chalice Extinguishing From Out the Cave (Joyce Sutphen)

When you have been
at war with yourself
for so many years that
you have forgotten why,
when you have been driving
for hours and only
gradually begin to realize
that you have lost the way,
when you have cut
hastily into the fabric,
when you have signed
papers in distraction,
when it has been centuries
since you watched the sun set
or the rain fall, and the clouds,
drifting overhead, pass as flat
as anything on a postcard;
when, in the midst of these
everyday nightmares, you
understand that you could
wake up,
you could turn
and go back
to the last thing you
remember doing
with your whole heart:

that passionate kiss,
the brilliant drop of love
rolling along the tongue of a green leaf,
then you wake,
you stumble from your cave,
blinking in the sun,
naming every shadow
as it slips.

Quotes (November 2011 "Who Am I?")

We know what we are, but not what we may be. ~William Shakespeare

Perhaps it's impossible to wear an identity without becoming what you pretend to be.
~Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game*

Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself. ~Harvey Fierstein

Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion. ~Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*

I've tried / to become someone else for a while, / only to discover that he, too, was me.
~Stephen Dunn

I am a person before I am anything else. I never say I am a writer. I never say I am an artist...I am a person who does those things. ~Edward Gorey

Be not another, if you can be yourself. ~Theophrastus Paracelsus

Trying to define yourself is like trying to bite your own teeth. ~Watts, Alan W

A verse from the Veda says, 'What you see, you become.' In other words, just the experience of perceiving the world makes you what you are. ~Deepak Chopra

A human being has so many skins inside, covering the depths of the heart. We know so many things, but we don't know ourselves! Why, thirty or forty skins or hides, as thick and hard as an ox's or bear's, cover the soul. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there. ~Meister Eckhart

Be who you are and say what you feel because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind. ~Dr. Seuss

Man, know thyself. ~Socrates

Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is enlightenment. ~Lao Tzu

Who has not sat, afraid, before his own heart's curtain? ~Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Fourth Elegy" (*Duino Elegies*)

The words "I am" are potent words; be careful what you hitch them to. The thing you're claiming has a way of reaching back and claiming you. ~A.L. Kitselman

This above all -- to thine own self be true. / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou shalt not then be false to any man. ~William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Act I Sc. iii)

Introductory Exercise (November 2011 "Who Am I?")

Facilitators: *Distribute pens and paper. Instruct the group to answer these questions without too terribly much analysis. The first or second answer that comes into their minds is probably good to go with. They can change their answers as they go along if they need to. The questions are asking about who they are right now in this hour on this day. Their answers are all private. They can share or not share later in the session; their choice. Read the questions to the group one at a time and give them a couple of minutes, if needed, to answer each—more time for some questions, less for others. It might help you gauge the time better if you ask them to put their pens down when they are done with each question. 10 answers to question #1 is important.*

1. Write down 10 words or phrases that complete the sentence "I am...." Consider whether these are the words that would most help a stranger understand who you are.
2. Ask yourself again the "Who Am I?" question. This time look for a response in the form of an image in your mind's eye. Give it a minute and be open to accepting what comes. Describe that image.
3. On your list of "I am...." sentences, cross out the three that would tell a stranger the *least* about your identity at the deepest level you know.
4. Write down your full name. Think about stories you could tell about your name.
5. On your list of "I am...." sentences, cross out the two that would tell a stranger the *least* about who you are at the deepest level you know.
6. Name five activities that, when you are engaged in them, move you toward feeling most fully alive, focused, connected, complete, and joyful.
7. On your list of "I am...." sentences, cross out the two that would tell a stranger the *least* about who you are at the deepest level you know.
8. Write down a few words you would like to have inscribed on your gravestone.
9. On your list of "I am...." sentences, cross out the two remaining that would tell a stranger the *least* about who you are at the deepest level you know. (This will leave participants with one "I am" sentence.)